

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 954

SO 012 555

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TITLE Curriculum Dissemination as Planned Cultural Diffusion.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 13p.: Paper presented at Annual Convention of the American Education Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Education: *Cultural Influences; *Curriculum Development: *Diffusion: *Educational Innovation: Educational Needs: Educational Theories: Elementary Secondary Education: *Information Dissemination: Student Attitudes: Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The author traces the change from the use of the term "diffusion" to the term "dissemination" with reference to curriculum projects in Britain and discusses implications of the change. Although at one time the two terms were used interchangeably, the term "dissemination" now emphasizes techniques of effective management rather than the educational problem of transmitting meaning. The author suggests that in abandoning the term "diffusion" curriculum developers have lost access to a theoretical framework. The task of curriculum diffusion is to transmit culture. In the interactions of the school and classroom it is difficult to introduce the new culture of an innovation without recognizing that teachers and pupils are guardians of the old culture. Attempts at planned innovation must help both pupils and teachers accept the culture carried by innovation. (Author/KC)

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CURRICULUM DISSEMINATION AS PLANNED CULTURAL DIFFUSION

A paper presented at the 1980 AERA conference, Boston, USA, by Jean Rudduck, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England

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A paper presented at the 1980 AERA conference, Boston, USA, by Jean Rudduck, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.

During the middle years of the curriculum development movement in Britain *, we started generally to use the term 'dissemination' instead of the term 'diffusion'. In doing so we lost access to a theoretical framework which might have helped us to make better sense of the process of curriculum change through curriculum projects. What did we lose? The argument of this paper is that we lost a cultural perspective in our work in dissemination and that this was a serious loss.

THE CHANGE IN TERMINOLOGY : "A Rose by any other name ..."

In Britain, among the earliest of the major curriculum development projects to make the change in terminology from 'diffusion' to 'dissemination' was the Humanities Curriculum Project. I was a member of the project team. It is difficult to know, retrospectively, whether in 1970 we were the legitimising early users of the new term - the innovation seemed, thereafter, to spread rapidly through the curriculum network - or whether there was a process of simultaneous response. Certainly the term 'dissemination' was already available, in the curriculum context, well before 1970, if not widely favoured. For example, the international conference on Curriculum Innovation in Practice held at Oxford in 1967 used the term 'dissemination' in its conference report; the opening paragraph of the relevant section of the report sketches the ground covered in discussion in this way : (the report was written by a British journalist) :

"Can the time lag between new ideas and new methods

* In this paper I have attempted to trace the use of the terms 'diffusion' and 'dissemination' only in the British curriculum development scene and have neither attempted a parallel exercise for American curriculum development nor related the pattern of use of the terms in the US to the pattern of use of the terms in Britain. There is, therefore, no discussion here of the writings of Havelock, Miles, Rogers and Shoemaker, House and others.

be shortened ? How can the world of curriculum development teams be translated into classroom practice without promoting a mindless band-wagon ? Is there a method of spreading new ideas quickly without making the schools 'fashion-conscious' ? These questions raise the whole subject of participation of practising teachers in curriculum development and the dissemination of new material through conferences and in-service training. What should be the status of the material itself and how should it be commended to the critical intelligence of teachers without endowing it with the wrong kind of authority ?" (p.24)

The unswerving use of the word 'dissemination' in this report may well owe something to a key paper given at the conference by Dr. Louis J. Rubin, (then Director of the Centre for Co-ordinated Education at the University of California, (Santa Barbara)) in which the term 'dissemination' was consistently used. Some of Rubin's statements, summarised in the report, are evidence of this usage :

" ... the dissemination programme should focus upon the appropriate consumer."

" ... the dissemination activity should acquaint the potential consumer with the innovation's advantages and disadvantages ..."

" ... people tend to communicate best at peer levels - board members are influenced by other board members, principals by other principals, and teachers by other teachers. Dissemination activity should take place on a variety of levels."

" ... many projects are valuable even if the notions being tested are unworkable. It is essential to distinguish between a quality project and a successful one. The failures as well as the successes of experimental projects are valuable coin for dissemination." (p. 31)

A year later, the Schools Council, a major funding agency in curriculum development in the UK, was just beginning to give serious thought to the process of communication and implementation - and in drawing attention to the importance of this process it used the term 'diffusion' :

"Something must be said about the development of a strategy of diffusion - the steps that must be taken to ensure that the stream of innovation does not disappear into the sand when the team's

products are published, or made available to teachers at large ..."
(Banks, a member of the Schools Council staff writing about 'Curriculum Development in Britain 1963-68', p. 256)

It is worth remarking that a significant feature of the 'diffusion' process as Banks viewed it, was a large number of 'associate trial schools' who joined the project after an initial period of development in a limited number of 'original trial schools' and before the project's materials were publicly available. There was clearly an assumption that 'diffusion' would proceed through the face-to-face communication of successful experience, with teachers taking a significant responsibility for communicating the innovation to other teachers in their locality. Banks made it clear that in his view 'diffusion' was a "slow and complex process which is likely to need careful planning and support over perhaps five (or more) years."

By 1972, however, the Schools Council was backing the 'dissemination' horse. It set up a Working Party to consider the problems of Dissemination and In-Service Training, and when the Working Party reported in 1974, it acknowledged the shift in terminology that had pre-dated the start of its period of study :

"It would be quite false to suppose that dissemination (or diffusion to use the older term) has only just become an issue. All projects seek to proselytize and all proselytizers by the nature of the calling are dissatisfied with the results. Projects have been developing ways of influencing people as long as they have been developing ideas and materials. A number of factors, however, have combined to make dissemination an issue of current importance." (p. 9)

Outside the Schools Council, writers were beginning to make distinctions between the two terms 'dissemination' and 'diffusion'. In 1971, Schon, in the chapter on "Diffusion of Innovation" in Beyond the Stable State made a distinction between the process of diffusion which he summarises in the metaphors of 'spread' or 'contagion' and a process called by him 'directed diffusion' which is essentially a managed process of "dissemination, training and provision of resources and incentives." Hoyle, writing for the Open University in 1972, incorporated Schon's definition into his

own work. Becher, (who was a member of the 1967 Oxford Conference) entitled a talk given in 1971, to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, "The Dissemination and Implementation of Educational Innovation" : he used the term 'dissemination' consistently, and without explanation or apology even when he was discussing Havelock on 'diffusion' ! It is apparent that there was in fact a period in which both terms sat side by side in the language of curriculum development in the U K. Why, then, was there, in 1972-73, evidence of a comprehensive shift towards the use of one term rather than the other ?

My own recollection as the member of a curriculum project team responsible for the project's diffusion (subsequently its dissemination) was that project teams were unhappy with the associations of haphazardness that the term 'diffusion' was thought to imply - a certain casualness about making contact with the system - and it may be that project teams protected their reputation, and boosted their confidence, by climbing on to the 'dissemination' raft. It is of interest to note that I, as the member of the project team responsible for the 'spread' of the Humanities Curriculum Project, called my published account : The Dissemination of Innovation : The Humanities Curriculum Project, whereas the project's evaluation team called their published account : From Council to Classroom : An Evaluation of the Diffusion of the Humanities Curriculum Project. The authors chose this title deliberately to mark the gap between intention and reality : their opening chapter on the dissemination of the project outlined the project team's aspirations for the communication of the ideas and experiences of the project, and a later chapter described the 'diffusion' of the project - that is, what actually happened. Diffusion had virtually become a synonym for failure - or, as I might phrase it, from my position within the project, partial success!

From the point of view of project sponsors, the term 'dissemination' seemed to have the appeal of efficient management (this is not, however, the sense in which Rubin used it in 1967). Hoyle's much cited definition emphasised the element of 'planning and control'. Banks' use of the term 'diffusion' (1969) reveals that his understanding of the process was closer to the understanding communicated by the work of the cultural diffusionists, such as

Linton, (1961), Kroeber, (1964) and Heine-Geldern, (1968). Banks refers to the slow progress of the spread of innovation as it makes its way through a population of teachers, moving outward from the innovative cells of the associate pilot schools, through the personal contact of teachers, to affect other schools in the area. A slow rate of progress was not, however, countenanced by the terms of project fundings : projects had fixed and relatively short life spans, with the possibility but not the certainty of some extension to continue with the communication task. We find, in the early 1970s, that the Schools Council began to be interested in coverage, speed, and competent planning :

"The present contacts between projects and these agencies (of communication) are too often haphazard, fitful and limited ..."
(Lincoln Ralphs, Chairman of the Schools Council, 1972, p. 5)

"Our concern ... is that the non-use of the Schools Council offerings should not spring from ignorance."
(Op.cit.)

"Any ruthless, hard sell would undermine the ability to discriminate; on the other hand an over-soft sell contains the risk, that, if a choice is made at all, it is based on inadequate knowledge. The Working Party has already agreed that the day of the blushing violet is ended and that positive promotion should be the aim."
(Op.cit.)

"Positive promotion, timely and relevant information, and widespread involvement should lead to successful adoption."

Similar sentiments were expressed when the Working Party reported in 1974 :

"Projects should plan dissemination to certain defined ends ... this insistence on planning and promotion will not be welcomed by some ... this must mean an end to the chance encounters of the past." (p.28)

The emerging policy was clearly to concentrate on the efficient transmission of information. To be fair the Council did express concern "to convey understanding" (1974, p. 28), but the tenor of the dissemination message was the importance of effective management of the process.

'MANAGEMENT' OR 'MEANING' ? : The Cultural perspective re-instated

Fullan and Pomfret (1975) suggest a distinction between 'dissemination' as 'project-centred', and 'diffusion' as 'user-centred'. I would give a slightly different emphasis and suggest that 'dissemination' came to acquire a 'management' orientation whereas 'diffusion' implies a 'meaning' orientation. What we have lost in abandoning the old term and adopting the new is access to a theoretical framework in which meaning matters as an index of cultural identity. The task of curriculum diffusion, as I, and one of my colleagues sees it, is similar to the task of education : it is to transmit culture. (Stenhouse, 1967). Diffusion theory, for curriculum developers, is a class of Education theory : Dissemination theory, has, I suggest, come to be regarded as a class of Administration theory.

The concept of culture as developed by Stenhouse is central to my argument :

"We assert that there must be a medium bridging the subjective experiences of minds which communicate with one another and we identify this as culture ..."
(1963, pp. 120 - 121)

This approach, as Stenhouse points out, detaches the notion of culture from numerable groups and attaches it instead to inter-active situations. Culture is located in the social process :

"Groups which interact without misunderstandings do so on the basis of a consensus of meanings manifested in linguistic usage and dependent upon a deeper consensus of values and understanding."
(1963, p. 122)

Stenhouse adds, significantly for my argument, that culture is "learned and shared". * The process of learning serves to associate the learners with a group that is already in possession of what is being learned, and to dissociate the learners from those who do

*Stenhouse, though not a structuralist, is citing the work of Talcott Parsons, 1952, p. 15.

not have access to the content of the learning. Groups achieve communicative interaction through the consensus of culture (p. 123) This holds for education, and, I propose, should hold for the dissemination of curriculum innovation. The aspirations, the process and the problems are similar.

Stenhouse (1967, p.20) writes about education as the 'explicit creation of culture in groups :

"The teacher himself is not naturally one of his pupils' acquaintances. Rather he is a kind of emissary from outside the culture represented by the class. The teacher, like the book he uses, is a source of experience outside that of the group he teaches. He presents to the group ideas which they would not readily find and assimilate themselves ... the teacher's problem becomes important to the culture of the group which learns it, so that it is maintained by sanctions."

I have, in an earlier paper (1977), discussed dissemination as the 'encounter of cultures'. In educational innovation, personal encounters co-incide with, and are the medium of, cultural encounters. The cultures which encounter each other in the dissemination of educational innovations are the culture of the disseminating group and the culture of the receiving group - the staff of a school or a team of teachers in a department of a school. The culture of the innovation itself, which is embodied in teaching materials and printed expressions of theory and which may be communicated orally at in-service courses by members of the disseminating group, challenges the professional culture of the recipient groups, the teachers, which is rooted in the structure of their institutions and the values represented in the traditional curriculum. Sarason (1971) draws attention to the cultural divide between the members of the disseminating group and the recipient group of teachers. The difference between these groups, he suggests, results in a credibility gap which makes it difficult for meanings to be negotiated.:

" ... many people having a role in, or concern for, educational planning and change possess no intimate knowledge of the culture of the setting they wish to influence and change ... many of the people involved have little or no basis, either in theory, or in experience, for understanding the structure of the school, its traditions and its usual ways of accommodating to change."

(Sarason, pp. 7-8)

This statement parallels Stenhouse's claim "that the teacher is a kind of emissary from outside the culture represented by the class." But, even more importantly, Sarason draws attention to our habit of being content to deal in dissemination with individual representatives of the culture of the school; in doing so, we demonstrate our insensitivity to the task of cultural transmission which requires close attention to the group as the guardian of the culture :

"In practice, most explicit and implicit perceptions of change derive from the language and vocabulary of an individual psychology that is in no way adequate to changing social settings."
(Sarason, p. 59)

I wrote earlier (1976) (without exploring the cultural dimension to the full) about the importance of working with the group - and ideally, working with the group in its usual setting - if the essentials of the new culture are to be taken up in a way that enables the members of the existing culture to learn to communicate within the new framework of meanings contributed by the innovation.

For planned innovation to be successful, the innovative possibility in the minds of the disseminators - which has the power to transform the existing culture and transpose the existing consensus of meaning - must become transparent to the members of the existing culture - and pupils as well as teachers are members of the existing culture of the school or classroom. Pupils' and teachers' definitions of reality are powerful bids in the negotiation of change, but it is not easy to negotiate the new without using the terms of the old : we will not be unfamiliar with the disheartening phenomenon of old meanings being ascribed to new culture elements - (Herskovits, 1955, p. 492) - a situation in which new practices simply become "more of the same". In another paper quoted at this conference (Hull and Rudduck) it is argued that it may be crucial to find iconic means of communicating the new behaviours required by an innovation since language that is rooted in old meanings may, until a new framework of understanding is established, not serve as a medium for communicating new meanings. 'Dissemination' can easily result in cultural stalemate without the actors or the initiators understanding the nature of the impasse; 'diffusion' alerts us to the cultural dimension of change and the complexity of the undertaking; the

negotiation of new and shared meanings is at the heart of the process.

It is perhaps not surprising that the 'dissemination' strategies that we have used to help teachers and pupils make and sustain fundamental changes in their work have been inadequate to accomplish the 'diffusion' task.

SUMMARY

I have suggested in this paper that an analysis of the shift in usage in the UK from 'diffusion' to 'dissemination' reveals a shift in the perception of the change process. The associations which have built up around the term 'dissemination' have led disseminators to emphasize techniques of management rather than the educational problem of transmitting meaning.

In abandoning the term 'diffusion' we have lost access to a cultural perspective which is an essential ingredient in our understanding of the change process. Culture is the medium which allows its members to communicate within a consensus of meaning. In the interactions of the school and classroom it is difficult to introduce the new culture of an innovation without paying attention to the negotiation of a new set of shared understandings and ways of behaving.

In this process, pupils as well as teachers must be recognized as guardians of the old culture, and attempts at planned innovation must therefore define themselves as attempts to help both pupils and teachers, as partners in the educational enterprise, come to accept and operate a working definition of the culture carried by the innovation.

In short, I have suggested that a theory of 'diffusion' is a class of education theory : where education is about the transmission of culture, 'dissemination' is about the transmission of a systematic set of changes in behaviour and understanding that amount to a new cultural pattern. Many of the problems of education are therefore similar to the problems of dissemination, and the task of dissemination must be analysed in this light.

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